

COMMENTS on behalf of Montana State Parks at hearing on SB 13 January 12, 2011

Bill No. 7

Date 1-13-11

I'm Paul Hickman, Executive Director of Our Montana, Inc. We're a non-profit organization dedicated to caring for Montana's Parks, Rivers, Historic Sites and Trails. I just want to share with you why I'm here.

Way back in 1994, our organization did some surveying, and found that almost every state in the union had a Friends of the State Parks sort of support group – except Montana, and maybe Mississippi. So we started one. We've been living proof that government agencies and private organizations can work well together.

We've been watching and helping where we could since that time. In 2003, we came to this very building during that year's legislative session. Several of our members and staff stood with others who came to ask you to support the bill that established the \$4 VOLUNTARY contribution to support the State Parks when they paid for their vehicle's license plate each year.

The Committee recommended it, both houses of the legislature voted for it, the governor signed it, and in went into effect January 1st, 1994.

Why did it pass? For several reasons, really, but here are a couple of the main ones.

1. Unlike the FISH or the WILDLIFE sections of FWP, PARKS did not have an adequate revenue source. The \$24 "passport" of those days was an OPT IN program that even though it was SIX TIMES more costly, the passport left the Parks department woefully short of what was needed to maintain our parks. Deferred Maintenance on parks was the annual rule.
2. With the \$4 fee for each tag, the vehicle owner can drive right in to any one of our 54 parks without a day use fee. It's the same amount that is charged for a single entry into a single park. It's convenient, and not a burden on anyone. And it increases the use of these facilities
3. Other states have tried the OPT-IN idea and found that only 2 to 3 percent go for it. Psychologists tell us that people are much more likely to say NO than yes in a circumstance like this, even when the offering is to their benefit.

NOW, IN 2011, YOUR MONTANA STATE PARKS HAVE NEVER LOOKED BETTER. And it's all due to that little \$4 annual fee that's asked of them on each registered vehicle. It's a very small contribution – perhaps less than many people spend on snacks or coffee in a day. And about the same as a bag of popcorn at the movie.

May I call your attention to the fact that a well maintained State Parks System is a huge economic benefit to MONTANA. In contrast to the days before this VOLUNTARY \$4 fee for parks was established, they are now well maintained, delightful places to take your family and guests. Tourists love them. The program is operating well now, people are accustomed to it, and they benefit greatly from this easy way to help maintain their Montana State Parks.

AND please don't forget that our PARKS department, in addition to caring for 54 Parks, is in charge of three hundred thirty six (336) FISHING ACCESS SITES, along Montana's beautiful rivers and streams. Some are bigger than some of the Parks !! That's a lot of grass to mow!

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, to change this simple system as proposed would be absolutely ruinous to our Montana State Parks. Lets leave well enough alone.

- To Opt IN would be to deal a DEVASTATING blow to our marvelous Sate Parks System.
- The present OPT OUT system IS a voluntary system. It ain't broke. PLEASE, let's don't try to fix it.

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THANK YOU!